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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3613

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH/WERNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2026

TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV KDEM LE SY IR

SUBJECT: MGLE01: JUMBLATT BELIEVES HIZBALLAH INTENDS
PERMANENT STATE-WITHIN-A-STATE

REF: A. BEIRUT 1560

¶B. BEIRUT 1559

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On 5/19, Druse leader Walid Jumblatt hosted the P-3 Ambassadors, Argentine Ambassador, Norwegian Ambassador, and UN representative Geir Pedersen for an open-air coffee in the Chouf mountains. Jumblatt's read-out of Hassan Nasrallah's hardline speech at the 5/16 National Dialogue session tracked closely with earlier briefings (ref a), although Jumblatt added details: Nasrallah claimed to have rockets that could reach 125 kilometers into Israel, and he kept referring back to the "people of the south" to give his presentation populist credentials. Jumblatt agreed that the March 14 participants must coordinate their response to Nasrallah in advance of the June 8 Dialogue session. He seemed open to the suggestion that bridges be built to Michel Aoun, although he guessed that Aoun would not be as receptive to the idea. (See ref b for Aoun's comments.)

¶2. (C) Asked about Nasrallah's motivation, Jumblatt said that the speech needed to be seen in the context of two other developments: permanent Hizballah military installations and communications lines currently being installed along the Lebanese-Israeli border from Ghajjar to the Mediterranean, and massive land purchases by the Shia of property in the south that had been owned by Christians and Druse. It is clear that Iranian money backs both the construction of bunkers and the land purchases, Jumblatt insisted. "Where else would they get the money?" In terms of the land sales, the prices offered are so inflated that the Christian and Druse who would normally keep the land are seduced into selling. Usually, Hizballah-affiliated charities are the purchasers.

¶3. (C) All of this "leads me to conclude," Jumblatt said, that Hizballah intends to strengthen its state-within-a-state status and make it permanent. The land purchases are stretching in the direction of the Biqa'a Valley, suggesting to Jumblatt that the Shia want to establish their own "canton" that will stretch along the border with Israel and the eastern border with Syria. While Hizballah will promote cooperation with the rest of Lebanon, the rest of Lebanon will not exercise control over this canton. And, because of the confessional veto Hizballah brandishes due to its near-monopoly on Shia political life, this canton will be able to stop initiatives proposed by the GOL, whereas the reverse is not true. This is surely by Iranian design, Jumblatt said, "at least I think so."

¶4. (C) Jumblatt then shepherded his diplomatic guests to

the main event, a mutton-filled lunch with 150 Druse sheikhs, all in traditional dress. Jumblatt gave an impromptu speech praising the virtues of UNSCR 1680 and extolling the strong support the international community has provided Lebanon since the passage of UNSCR 1559. Waving his arms at the ambassadors, Jumblatt told his sheikhs that the countries and institutions represented had played key roles in restoring Lebanon's sovereignty, and he explained to his sheikhs that the most important question facing Lebanon today was not whether but how to put the arms of Hizballah under the control of the state. He also gave a blistering attack on Syria, accusing the Syrians of killing Lebanese political leaders "from Kamal Jumblatt through Rafiq Hariri and up Gebran Tueni." (Comment: Jumblatt clearly used the ambassadors as a political message to his own followers. Distant-second Druse leader Talal Arslan would have trouble persuading even one ambassador to visit him. But, given the content of Jumblatt's comments, it is political message that we don't mind lending our presumed prestige to support. End comment.)

FELTMAN